

# Commissioner's Office

Utah agriculture continued to make positive strides in 2006, despite the onset of drought conditions, the state's largest recorded wildfire, and the continuing challenges associated with Utah's population growth.

One of the department's key areas of focus is maintaining healthy landscapes throughout the state for the benefit of all Utahns. The Department's new Grazing Improvement Program (GIP) and Commissioner Leonard Blackham's leadership of the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development are providing farmers and ranchers with important tools to protect their natural resources and improve production capacity and profitability.

Utah's agricultural economy heavily relies on livestock production. Therefore, improvements to the health of our grazing landscape generate long term positive impacts for ranchers, their families, their communities, and the state as a whole.

Governor Huntsman and the Utah Legislature supported the creation of the new Grazing Improvement Program (GIP). Under the program, five regional grazing advisory boards were created to help ranchers plan range improvement projects and apply for grants. Twenty six projects were funded in 2006 with 88 scheduled to begin in the next two years.

One of GIP's goal is to change various policies to encourage longterm investment in healthy landscapes that benefit all Utahns. Healthy lands help prevent catastrophic wildfires.

Healthy lands sustain wildlife and livestock and contribute to the economic growth of rural Utah. Healthy landscapes improve water and air quality and elevate our state's quality of life. On a national scale, wildfire suppression costs about \$150 per acre. Managing healthy lands by controlling invasive grass species and preventing soil erosion costs about \$50 an acre.

A major effort to improve land use practices was undertaken in 2007 with the addition of former U.S. Bureau of Land Management Director, Kathleen Clarke to the department. Kathleen will be working to expand watershed and range restoration programs, and to develop and promote grazing practices that are both profitable for ranchers and good for the land. She will also work with the Executive Team at UDAF to enhance public awareness and appreciation of the role agriculture plays in our "quality of life" in Utah, both for the production of food and fiber but also in the stewardship of Utah's priceless lands and natural resources.

An infestation of Japanese beetle required the activation of an emergency insect declaration by Commissioner Blackham. With the concurrence of a specially formed Japanese Beetle Decision and Action Committee, the department took quick action in the spring and summer of 2007 to isolate and treat about 480 acres of residential area in central Orem.

A high profile community support campaign launched in early 2007 brought together Orem residents, city and county leaders, federal and state agencies, Utah State University, local churches, business leaders, and dozens of individuals. Neighborhood town meetings were held to outline the threat, discuss treatment options, and answer questions from residents.

The eradication program is a three-year effort that depends on community support and cooperation. Year one of the project was highly successful, thanks to the overwhelming support of the affected neighborhoods. Beetle numbers were reduced following turf and leaf applications.

The state's largest recorded wildfire was one of four large fires that consumed more than 650,000 acres in 2007 and contributed to a national agricultural disaster declaration. The impacts of these catastrophic fires include: -- More than 40 days of poor air quality throughout the state with 19 Red Alert days and 21 Yellow Alert days. -- Six human deaths from automobile accidents caused by blowing smoke and ash across

A series of four large wildfires destroyed more than 650,000 acres of rangeland in 2007 causing an estimated \$6 million in damage to Utah farmers and ranchers. Drought conditions also contributed to a federal agricultural disaster declaration in Utah.

Interstate-15.



(left) Newly appointed Assistant Commissioner, Kathleen Clarke, was introduced to employees, including Jake Jacobson, in June.

Kyle R. Stephens  
Deputy Commissioner



Additional strides to protect food safety were taken when a new computerized inspection system went on line in 2006. UDAF food inspectors will more accurately track food handling violations and reduce the incidents of foodborne illness through a web based Food Safety Management System. The division's 12 food inspectors will enter inspection reports on their laptop computers. The information will then be added to the main system via the Internet. The inspection report data can then be compiled to track trends and specific problems.

Visit the State of Utah's Performance Elevated Internet site to learn more about other important programs at the UDAF.

<http://performance.utah.gov/agencies/udaf.shtml>



#### Deputy Commissioner

In addition to filling in for the commissioner on various assignments, the deputy commissioner, Kyle Stephens, is responsible for the following activities: Coordinates the Certified Agriculture Mediation Program and the Utah Horse Racing Commission. Is the Treasurer for the Agriculture in the Classroom Program, promulgation of all department administrative rules, collection of predator assessment head tax, is the Department's Hearing Officer and serves on the Utah Dairy Commission and Utah Dairyman's Association as an ex-officio member. The deputy commissioner also oversees and coordinates the department's Balanced Scorecard that is an outcome-based measure of the our performance. He also oversees the department's strategic plan.

Deputy Commissioner Stephens works closely with the Utah Legislature during the year, and compiled the following recap of a select number of agriculture-oriented bills that passed the 2006 Legislative session.

**HB72** - Brand Inspection of Livestock Seized by the Federal Government. Rep Noel: Codifies requirements for brand inspection on livestock seized by the Federal Government

**HB132** - Registration and License Requirements for Pesticide Businesses and Applicators. Rep Draxler. Bill creates requirements for Pesticide Applicator Businesses to be registered.

**HB145** - Farmers Market Exemptions. Rep Menlove. Defines Farmers Markets and provides exemptions from liability concerns with municipalities.

**HB 311S01** - Utah Dairy Act Amendments. Rep Gibson. This bill amends current statute to open up the sales of raw milk and defines, then prohibits a Cow Share program.

**HB339S01** - Regulation of Cottage food Production. Rep Barrus. Defines cottage food production operations and outlines requirements for operations.

**SB47** - Department of Agriculture Amendments. Sen Dayton. Rep Painter. Updates section of Ag code and repeals two sections of the act. Amended in House to add three new members to the Conservation Commission.

**SB195S01** - Fish Health Amendments. Sen Peterson. Makes changes to act and establishes testing procedures. Adds governor appointments for a three member independent review panel.



A TrueGreen ChemLawn employee treats the lawn of one of the 1800 Orem residents whose neighborhood was infested with the destructive Japanese beetle in 2006 and 2007. The UDAF is working closely with neighbors to eradicate the highly destructive insect.

#### Agriculture Homeland Security Division

In recognition of the increasing potential threat of agricultural terrorism, Commissioner Leonard Blackham has established a Division of Agriculture Homeland Security within the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF). The mission of this division is to organize, plan, mitigate, train, educate, and maintain awareness of the potential threats to Utah agricultural department personnel, state emergency providers, agricultural producers, and public consumers or agricultural products. The challenges of a threatening and changing world face all producers in the state and ultimately may affect every citizen in the state. Utah's

agricultural economic base and our special Utah quality of life potentially would be significantly impacted if there were a deliberate or naturally occurring animal or plant disease that would be intentionally or inadvertently be introduced into our state. The same holds true for other agricultural pests and diseases. The security of our food and fiber is crucial to all the citizens of the state.

During this past year, a coordinated effort to train all the key leadership of the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food has been accomplished. All key positions have been introduced to the national emergency planning and operations concepts as outlined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency by successfully completing a series of National Incident

Management System training modules. A specific Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) has been developed for UDAF in conjunction with the Department of Public Service, Division of Homeland Security. This plan has been developed to assist in the response to events that may disrupt normal activities within the Department of Agriculture and Food, whether they are minor or catastrophic. The COOP is organized to deliver a maximized resource to the event while minimizing the impact of the event to normal activities within the agency. The COOP provides a road map of predetermined actions to reduce decision-making during recovery operations, resume critical services quickly, and enable resumption of normal service at the earliest possible time in the most cost effective manner. This plan will help to establish, organize, and document risk assessments, responsibilities, policies and procedures, and agreements and understandings for the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food with other agencies and entities that will be responding to an emergency, directly involve with an incident, or involved in the collateral actions coordinated with an agricultural emergency event.

This past year has seen the establishment of this new division and an experienced past division director leading the formation of the division format. The basic plans and training have been accomplished during this first year. A new full time director has been asked to serve in this capacity by Commissioner Blackham. Dr. Chris Crnich will lead the Division of Agriculture Homeland Security into the next year. A year of training and organization will be of utmost importance upon the commissioner's mind, as we prepare our UDAF agricultural specialists to be aware and ready to respond to any emergency/disaster that may affect the agricultural community and ultimately the economic and social basis of our Utah culture, lifestyle, livelihood, and heritage.

#### Public Information Office

The office of Public Information is an important link between the public, industry, employees, and other state agencies. The office publishes various brochures, articles and newsletters as well as creates displays and computer presentations. The office also writes news releases and serves as spokesperson for the department. The office has added video-tape capabilities to produce video news releases and video clips that can be viewed at <http://ag.utah.gov/UDAFVideos.html>.

During the past year, the office created public awareness campaigns for many of the department's activities such as: Food safety inspection recalls, Grazing Improvement Program, Healthy Landscapes, Japanese beetle eradication program, Mormon cricket and grasshopper control.

The Public Information Office also interacts with local schools, offering students lessons on the connection between the farm

and our food. A complete list of UDAF news releases is available at: <http://ag.utah.gov/pressrel/agnews.html>.

#### Agriculture Mediation Program

The department continues to provide services to the agriculture community through its USDA Certified Mediation Program. The program assists farmers and ranchers who face adverse actions in connection with USDA programs. Utah is one of 33 certified programs and has administered this program since 1988.

Utah farmers and ranches who rely on the Certified State Agriculture Mediation Program to help them through difficult economic times have had that valuable service extended after the passage of the Agriculture Mediation Bill. The program helps farmers and ranchers seek confidential advice and counsel to address loan problems and disputes before they grow to be too much for the producer to handle. The legislation will continue to authorize funding of the Certified State Agriculture Mediation Program for five years. Mediation provides a neutral, confidential forum to discuss complex issues and build strong working relationships with producers, lenders and government agencies.

#### Agriculture in the Classroom

The mission of Utah is to increase agricultural literacy in Utah by developing a program that improves student awareness about agriculture and instills in students an appreciation for our food and fiber system. This program is necessary because agriculture affects our quality of life and our environment.

The AITC program receives funds from private donors, state funding sources, and grants. These funds are leveraged to meet the programs mission through teacher training, and classroom materials that effectively and efficiently meet the need to increase agricultural literacy.



Photo courtesy of NRCS